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2 **BEFORE THE STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY**
3 **STATE OF NEVADA**

4 In Re:

5 Nevada Connections Academy Notice of
6 Closure or Possible Board Reconstitution
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8 **DECLARATION OF MARISA DELGADO**

9 I, Marisa Delgado, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:
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11 1. I am a Nevada Connections Academy (“NCA”) board member. I make this
12 declaration in support of NCA relative to closure proceedings before the State Public Charter
13 School Authority held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and continued to an unspecified date in
14 2017.

15 2. The matters set forth in this declaration are based on my own personal knowledge.
16 If called upon to testify, I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.

17 3. I am recently accepted the position as principal of Saint Francis de Sales for the
18 2017-2018 school year, a K-8 private grade school. Prior to that, starting in 2009, I was the math
19 department chair, math teacher, mentor teacher, and assistant student leadership advisor at
20 Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas, Nevada. I have a bachelor's degree in Secondary
21 Education Mathematics from the University of Nevada, Reno, and a master's degree in
22 Educational Leadership from the University of Cincinnati. I also have both current teaching
23 license and administrative license in the state of Nevada.
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25 4. I have served on the NCA board for approximately four years. As such, I attend
26 monthly meetings, look over monthly packages and media sources, evaluate administrators,
27 attend graduations, and have attended charter authority meetings. We also have monthly
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1 meetings with NCA regarding goals, student performance, and expectations. NCA provides
2 NCA School Leader Steve Werlein with a mentor that evaluates and gives feedback to the board
3 about how he is doing and his data analysis. The NCA board has also increased our review of
4 the school's data to drive the curriculum and student improvement.

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6 5. NCA's graduation rate has been a prevalent topic of discussion with the NCA
7 board. However, examining the data, we recognize that within our 4-year cohort, those who
8 enter NCA their freshman year, graduate a rate over 80%. NCA's K-5 program is doing an
9 exemplary job—test scores are great. Middle school is doing a good job as well, focusing on
10 literacy and math to continue to improve. With regard to NCA's ability to serve its students
11 well, the state's calculation of the "graduation rate" is flawed.

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13 6. In efforts to improve its graduation rate as the state calculates it, NCA has
14 implemented a credit recovery program, hired a new employee that concentrates on student
15 retention and checking in and out students that are considered at-risk. We also have raised the
16 standard of our students that are considered at-risk. We may have more at-risk students due to
17 this, but it has been effective in helping to identify at-risk students earlier on and addressing
18 issues quickly. We have approved summer school funds for credit recovery. We have a literacy
19 director and have increased scaffolding for math programs. NCA also provides overwhelming
20 support for parents and students who need it—including summer school scholarships, one-on-
21 one face time with teachers, and periodic check-ins.

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23 7. As a longtime educator, I feel that student learning should be the center of all we
24 do in education, and I recognize that a single data point does not always reflect that. We serve a
25 different population: transient students, bullied students, athletes, credit-deficient students,
26 behavior students, etc. For example, a student that enrolls with NCA credit-deficient and remains
27 enrolled for a mere 14 days cannot be considered an accurate reflection of NCA's ability to serve
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1 its students. Likewise, a student who leaves NCA and enrolls in a different school but is not
2 diligent about providing paperwork from the second school is considered a dropout, counting
3 against NCA's graduation rate and again not accurately reflecting NCA's ability.

4 8. I am concerned that the proceedings before the State Public Charter School
5 Authority are impeding our ability to prioritize student education—which is NCA's main goal
6 and the goal that the NCA board primarily oversees. NCA spent money, at SPCSA Staff
7 Director Patrick Gavin's direction, on a private investigator to locate students when we could be
8 spending money on student learning. I am concerned about the expenditure of funds required to
9 do this and to otherwise defend against Authority Staff's threats of closure because the money
10 we spend on locating departed students takes away from the money we spend to educate the
11 student population that are enrolled with NCA. Likewise, we cannot be putting student
12 education first if the Authority expects the school to bring credit-deficient students up to speed at
13 an impossible rate—if a student failed the majority of classes at his or her previous school in the
14 previous year, then enrolls in NCA and takes advantage of NCA's credit-recovery program to
15 make up credits, the school cannot always reasonably expect the student to make up credits in
16 time to graduate in four years while also prioritizing the student's learning and retention of the
17 information. To require too much of students would, at some point, infringe upon NCA's
18 obligation to do its due diligence as an educational institution.

19 9. In preparing the graduation rate improvement plan submitted to the Authority in
20 2016, we had lengthy conversations with NCA and with school administrators about how we can
21 hold our students accountable, help students be successful, and provide for them the support
22 required to achieve success.

23 10. I have been involved in efforts to procure new NCA board members, and have
24 personally tried to recruit several people in the education world and reviewed resumes sent to the
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1 board. I have found that it is very difficult to find replacements for board members who leave.
2 During our meetings we have in depth conversations about applicants' qualifications and
3 whether they are qualified to fill a vacant seat, based on our by-laws. Because it has been so
4 challenging to find educated, qualified candidates, without a conflict of interest that are willing
5 to volunteer their time, it has taken a year to find a replacement for a current member.
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7 11. Based on my experience as an NCA board member, I feel that our board is not the
8 reason behind the Authority's concern about the high school's graduation rate, and reconstitution
9 of NCA's board would not address the Authority's concern. The root of the concern lies in the
10 Authority's view of the school as a single flawed data point instead of looking at the school as a
11 whole.
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13 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
14 foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 12 day of June, 2017, in Las Vegas,
15 Nevada.
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18 MARISA DELGADO
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